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Alexandra R. Cotran

University of South Carolina - Columbia, acotran@email.sc.edu

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Perceptions of Music Play Activities Performed by a Mother and Her Children

By

Alexandra R. Cotran

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
Graduation with Honors from the
South Carolina Honors College

May, 2018

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wendy H. Valerio". The script is cursive and fluid.

Wendy Valerio
Director of Thesis

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Gregory Springer". The script is cursive and stylized, with large loops.

D. Gregory Springer
Second Reader

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to examine the music play activities performed by a mother Dr. Smith, and her children, John (age 3) and Pam (age 6). The guiding research questions were (a) What types of music play activities did Dr. Smith and her children perform when they were not in music play classes?; (b) How did Dr. Smith describe those activities?; (c) What were Dr. Smith's observations of her children's music development and learning?; (d) How did Dr. Smith use and adapt music play activities learned in class for her children at home or elsewhere?; (e) How did Kat Arrasmith and Julia Beck, music play teachers of Dr. Smith's children, describe and interpret the music play activities Dr. Smith and her children performed at home or elsewhere?; and (f) What recommendations does Dr. Smith have for parents of young children who want to engage their children in music at home or elsewhere? The following three themes emerged from think-aloud interview transcript analysis: (a) John's music play at home included defiance; (b) Dr. Smith was a musical nurturer at home, and (3) Pam's music play at home included leadership. Though John's music play seemed defiant, it was often in the meter and the tempo of the music play activity in which he and his mom were engaged. Dr. Smith was a musical nurturer in that she consistently provided positive feedback or praise to her children's music making activities. She guided the children without trying to control the play. Pam executed her understanding of the social rules of the music play activities and was a leader by directing the playful activity by almost acting like a parent.

Key terms: music play, mother, children

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

At the University of South Carolina, Gordon's (2013) music learning theory is studied and applied. Gordon documented through research that all children are born with music aptitude, which is the potential for achievement in music. According to Gordon, music aptitude is normally distributed in the population, and can fluctuate until a child is 9 years old. In order to develop a child's musical aptitude, Gordon argued that audiation must be strengthened. Audiation "takes place when a piece of music is heard and comprehended silently, no longer or never physically present" (Gordon, 2013, p. 21).

According to Gordon (2013), children learn music through seven stages of preparatory audiation. The first three stages, which are absorption, random response and purposeful response respectively, occur between the ages of birth to 2-4 years old. In the first stage, children listen and absorb the sounds in their environment. In the second stage, children move and babble in ways unrelated to their environment. As children proceed to the third stage, their musical responses occur in direct relation to their environment. As children grow from around the age of 2-4 to 3-5, they enter into the second type of preparatory audiation, which is Imitation. During the two stages of this age range, children can distinguish whether their responses are the same or different from their environment and eventually, begin to accurately imitate the singing or chanting in the environment. The final type of preparatory audiation is Assimilation, which occurs between the ages of 3-5 to 4-6. In this period during the final stages, children notice the relationship between breathing and moving and singing or chanting; they also begin to coordinate the relationship between the singing or chanting and breathing and develop awareness of tonality and meter.

Some researchers (Kirby, 2007; Robert, 1992) examined parents and their children engaged in music play activities. Robert (1992) investigated how infants vocally respond to three criterion songs to further understand young children's music babble. Robert transcribed the random babble responses of the two children, who were involved in music play classes on the USC campus and engaged in similar activities at home. Robert found that there is a relationship between participation in music play classes and a child's babble responses in a home music setting. The activities within a group setting increased the frequency of the responses to the criterion songs in the home. Kirby (2007) researched the interactions between a mother and her two-year-old child, and found that two factors exist, including environment and support. (Kirby, 2007) The parents and children that Kirby and Robert examined were members of music play classes at USC School of Music.

Recently, Dr. Smith and her children Pam (age 6) and John (age 3) were members of Music Play classes at the USC School of Music (Music Play-University of South Carolina. (2017)¹. In those classes for infants through four-year-old children, the teachers used Gordon's *Music Learning Theory for Newborn and Young Children* (2013) and *Jump Right In! The Early Childhood Music Curriculum, Music Play* (Valerio, W. H., Reynolds, A. M., Taggart, C. C., Bolton, B. B., Gordon, E. E., 1998) to develop the music potential of young children. The infants and children begin each class by listening to their teachers. The teachers and parents perform a variety of songs and chants, accompany their songs and chants with creative movements, and use tangible objects such as scarves and balls to encourage the children to interact informally with others and continue to listen to their environment. During the classes, children demonstrate music

¹ Dr. Smith, Pam, and John are pseudonyms.

babble, which is playing vocally with the sounds of music. The teachers and parents use social music interactions to guide them to become more accurate in music imitation and improvisation.

Dr. Smith has engaged in music play activities with her children, John and Pam, at home, and she has provided my thesis director with several anecdotal music-play reports. If documented and examined in a qualitative research design those reports and perceptions of those reports, may provide helpful insights to early childhood music educators and parents of young children.

Research Purpose

With the intent of enhancing early childhood music development and understanding, the purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions of music play activities performed by a mother and her children. Following were the guiding research questions of this study.

- What types of music play activities did Dr. Smith and her children perform when they were not in music play classes?
- How did Dr. Smith describe those activities?
- What were Dr. Smith's observations of her children's music development and learning?
- How did Dr. Smith use and adapt music play activities learned in class for her children at home or elsewhere?
- How did Kat Arrasmith and Julia Beck, music play teachers of Dr. Smith's children, describe and interpret the music play activities Dr. Smith and her children performed at home or elsewhere?
- What recommendations did Dr. Smith have for parents of young children who want to engage their children in music at home or elsewhere?

CHAPTER 2 RELATED RESEARCH

A Phenomenological Case Study of Music Interactions Between a Mother and Her Child

Kirby (2007)

Kirby discussed “the nature of music vocalizations of a two-year-old child and his primary caregiver,” (p.35). The guiding research questions included:

- What are a mother’s perceptions and interpretations of her child’s music behaviors and music interactions with her?
- What are the researcher’s perceptions and interpretations of a child’s music behaviors and music interactions with his mother? (p. 35)

Method

Participants and setting In this qualitative case study, Kirby examined a two-year-old child, Griffin, and his mother, Sharon. Sharon was a music educator who taught private violin lessons to approximately 30 students and led a children’s choir at church. The setting was a naturalistic setting of the mother and her child’s musical interactions.

Data collection, procedures and analysis Kirby took data in multiple forms, including interviews, video recordings, and written responses. The investigation began with an initial interview of Sharon to determine her “past music interactions with her parents and her current music interactions with Griffin” (p. 23). Sharon then was instructed to “videotape music interactions between herself and Griffin over 6 months” (p.24). Those activities included “daily activities, playtime, meals, travel time in the car or at any other time she believed music interactions would occur” (p. 24). Sharon was then asked to include a written diary of observations

to the videotaped sessions. The researched also videotaped Sharon and Griffin in an early childhood music class, followed by a think-aloud interview with Sharon.

Findings and Discussions Kirby found the themes of (a) environment and (b) support of musical behaviors to be recurring throughout the study. Griffin's environment was "saturated with a variety of musical activities" (p. 28). He was absorbing all of the violin lessons that his mother taught in the home, and he even began to move and sing without realizing he was doing anything. On top of Griffin's already saturated home environment, "Sharon and her family support Griffin's music behaviors that he exhibits" (p.32), as well as Griffin's other interests through his musical interactions, i.e. bugs

Relevance to Current Study Kirby examined the musical interactions between a child and his mother, which is very similar to my study of music play interactions between a mother and her two children. The mother in Kirby's study is a musician, and Dr. Smith and her husband are also musicians. Music was often present in the Smith household, so Pam and John are also saturated with musical activities, along with being in a supportive environment.

Vocal Responses of Two Infants to Three Criterion Songs

Robert (1999)

Robert discussed the vocal responses of two infants to three criterion songs 1) in a classroom group music lesson environment, 2) in home individual music lesson environments. Robert used criterion songs "in major tonality, in the keyality of D, and in usual duple meter." (p.7) One song ended on the resting tone, one on the mediant, and one on the dominant pitch.

Method

Participants and setting In this qualitative case study, two 11-month old infants were used for the research. The infants were "enrolled in music classes at the Children's Development Center

(CMDC) at the University of South Carolina.” (p.17) The infants must have been “participating in her first semester of music classes, and vocally responsive to music” (p.17) The two infants were observed in “group preschool music class[es] at CMDC” (p.17).

Data collection, procedures and analysis Robert collected data by videotape recordings of ten weeks of classes with the two 11-month-old infants, as well as in individual home music sessions. During the class sessions and the home sessions, the research used a variety of songs, chants, and movement along with the three criterion songs. The videos were edited to include only the criterion song followed by a ten-second response period. Written observations were recorded following this section. After the data collection period, “two independent observers viewed the edited videotape recordings and determined the type and frequency of vocal responses made by each infant” (p. 20). The researcher analyzed “the type and frequency of vocal responses performed by each child to the three criterion songs in the classroom group music lesson environment” (p.20) and in the “home individual music lesson environment” (p. 20).

Findings and Discussions Robert found that “each infant performed more speaking responses than any other type of vocal response in the classroom group music setting” (p. 57) and Subject One performed mostly random babble in the home setting, while Subject Two performed mostly speaking responses and tonal responses. Robert determined (1) “there is a relationship between a child’s tonal vocal responses made in a classroom group music environment and a child’s tonal vocal responses in a home individual music environment” (p. 58), and “it seems logical to assume that the classroom group music activities give rise to the home music responses made by young children” (p. 59).

Relevance to Current Study Robert studied the relationship between an infant’s music responses at home based on their involvement in group music classes. This is similar to my

research with John and Pam. The children's involvement with music play classes may have caused increase to music responses at home, as recorded by their mother.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Participants

After obtaining University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board approval, I invited Dr. Sara Smith and her two children, John and Pam, to participate in this study. Dr. Smith received and agreed to participate by signing a letter of informed consent describing her participation and the use of videos of her children in this study.

During this study, Dr. Smith, was an Assistant Professor of Piano and Piano Pedagogy with a Ph.D. in Music Education with an emphasis in Piano Pedagogy, and was directed the Center for Piano Studies at the University of South Carolina (USC). At the time of data collection, her son, John was 3-years old, and her daughter Pam was 6-years old. Dr. Smith and her children participated in the Music Play Classes at USC (Music Play-University of South Carolina, 2017) and engaged in music play activities at home. I also invited Ms. Kat Arrasmith and Mrs. Julia Beck, Music Play teachers for John and Pam at the USC Children Music Development Center, to participate in the study.

During data collection, Kat Arrasmith was completing a Masters in Music Education degree with Early Childhood and General Music emphasis from the University of South Carolina. She graduated from Baldwin Wallace University with an undergraduate degree in Music Education. Kat has nine years of early childhood experience with six years of teaching experience elementary general music. She also holds certifications in GIML early childhood (levels 1 and 2) and elementary (level 1), Orff (levels 1 and 2), and Fierabend First Steps in Early Childhood. Kat also taught infants-K4 at Bright Horizons at the University of South Carolina, Grade 1-Grade 4 general music at St. Peter's Catholic Elementary School, Columbia, SC, community music classes

for infants-4-year olds and their parents/caregivers at the University of South Carolina School of Music.

At the time of data collection, Julia Beck was completing a Masters in Music Education degree with Early Childhood and General Music emphasis from the University of South Carolina. She received her Bachelor's in Music Education from Baldwin Wallace University. Julia was researching parent's observations of their young children's music behaviors. She, also taught infants-K4 at Bright Horizons at the University of South Carolina, K4, K5, Grade 5-6 general music at St. Peter's Catholic Elementary School, Columbia, SC, and community music classes for infants-4-year olds and their parents/caregivers at the University of South Carolina School of Music.

Data Collection

Dr. Smith collected videos of her children engaging in music play activities at home and in their car. She agreed for me to use those videos as data for this study. Dr. Smith participated in think-aloud interviews with me. During those interviews, she watched the videos of her children in music play activities and made comments regarding her observations. I audio recorded her comments using an Iphone and transcribed those comments for subsequent analysis.

Kat and Julia participated in individual think-aloud interviews as they each watched the videos of Dr. Smith's children in music play activities. I audio-recorded Kat's and Julia's think-aloud interviews and transcribed their comments for subsequent analysis.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Data Analysis

As prescribed by Patton (2015) I reduced personal bias by practicing epoche and reviewed all of the transcribed raw data. After transcribing the data, I reviewed the data objectively and impartially categorized the data. Then, I developed a coding system using hard copies of the transcripts and colored pens.

Credibility

In order to enhance credibility, I achieved triangulation by having multiple persons participate in think-aloud interviews. I also had Dr. Smith, Kat, and Julia review the transcripts of their interviews, and I asked follow-up questions regarding each of their interviews. Finally, I had the participants review my data analysis and offer comments and suggestions.

I divided the data into specific actions discussed by Dr. Smith, Kat, and Julia during their interviews. After developing and finalizing my codes, I organized my data into action categories supported by action examples as presented in Figure 1.

ACTION CATEGORIES	ACTION EXAMPLES
Parental Involvement	Parents Making Music (PMM) Parent Observations (PO) Recording on Phone (ROP)
Non-Musical Activities	John talks (FT) Pam talks (LT) John plays (FP) John growls (FG) John refuses to participate (FRP) Pam as leader (LAL) Body Coordination (BC) Dance and Movement (DAM) Repetition (REP) Reading (R) Reading Music (RM)
Active Music Making	Pam sings (LS) Pam plays piano (LPP) John sings (FS) Folksongs (F) John Microbeat (FM) Pam improvises (LI) John improvises (FI) John imitates (FIM) Pam imitates (LIM) Pam performs rhythm (LR) John performs rhythm (FR) Pam does tonal pattern (LTP) John does tonal pattern (FTP)
Active Music Making Together	Pam and John interact musically (LFIM)

Figure 1. Action categories and examples.

Emergent Themes

You need a statement regarding how you found these three themes. What kind of analysis did you do? I think you have it in Chapter Five, but not here.

Three themes emerged regarding music play activities within the home.

- John's music play at home include defiance.
- Dr. Smith s a musical nurturer at home.
- Pam's music play at home include leadership.

Theme One: John's music play at home includes defiance.

Dr. Smith, Kat, and Julia each discussed John's current defiance in his music play activities at home. John was three-years-old and had just recently started exhibiting these acts of defiance. Dr. Smith described this behavior as a recent occurrence, because he used to "echo patterns like almost readily" (S. Smith, think-aloud interview, November 11, 2017), but now that he is three years old, "it seems like there is a behavioral thing where he doesn't want to do it all of the time" (S. Smith, think-aloud interview, November 11, 2017). Interestingly enough, Dr. Smith mentions that if you get John "in that play mindset, then he does it without realizing it". (S. Smith, think-aloud interview, November 11, 2017) Pam had the same mindset at the same age, according to Dr. Smith.

Throughout the videos and recordings, John exhibited defiance in multiple ways. There were a variety of behavioral outbursts that were associated with this behavior, including John verbally refusing by saying, "Mom, stop" or, "No". In one video, John was on a horse while his mom was singing one of the *Music Play* (Valerio, et al., 1998) songs, "My Pony Bill", and he was clicking his tongue on the microbeat. Eventually, John started to say, "No," in the triple meter of the song. He was refusing, but still participating in the game without even realizing it.

John also had a tendency to growl when he responded to a tonal pattern, rhythm pattern, or when he was singing. Dr. Smith mentioned that this behavior started "this fall [2017]" and "it's kind of his thing everywhere....to growl and be ghosts and dinosaurs and alligators" (S. Smith, think-aloud interview, November 11, 2017). Julia and Kat discussed that they had seen this

behavior within the music play classes with John. Kat mentioned that thinks that John was in a “silly, goofy stage...and [he was] pressing the limits of how silly he can be within the structure of the class” (K. Arrasmith, think-aloud interview, March 10, 2018) Julia had seen similar behaviors within her own thesis research. She discussed that in her investigations, she noticed that around the age of 3-4 “there is a growling stage and a screaming stage, especially in boys” (J. Beck, think-aloud interview, March 10, 2018) She mentioned that John is right in the middle of this stage. John’s defiant behaviors were seen to be defiant, only to a certain extent, as he would ultimately participate in music play even after telling his mom, “No”.

Theme Two: Dr. Smith was a musical nurturer.

While engaging in music play at home or elsewhere, Dr. Smith exhibited nurturing behaviors to her children as she facilitated the musical activities. In the videos or recordings, she was very direct in giving specific, positive feedback when her children demonstrated positive, musical behaviors. She allowed the children to experiment in improvisation and in one recording, Dr. Smith sang, “That was a great song,” in the tonality of the improvised tune that John and Pam were creating. She allowed John and Pam to participate equally in whatever activity is occurring, by prompting them with, “It’s John’s turn now,” or “It’s Pam’s turn now,”. Dr. Smith also took ownership by starting many of the *Music Play* (Valerio, et al. 1998) activities, including “Stirring Soup” and “Scrubba Dub” and “Choppity Chop” (traditional) when her children were in the bathtub. She also sang tonal patterns for the children to imitate in between musical activities. The family often listened to folk song recordings within their household.

Dr. Smith, Kat, and Julia all mentioned the importance of parents being actively involved in their children’s music making. Dr. Smith and her husband are musicians, and they often played the piano or engaged in music making. Kat and Julia discussed that one of the recommendations

that they give parents is that there is always something musical occurring within the house, as well as to make sure they are engaging in the music with their children. Julia mentioned specifically that she believes in the importance of involvement in community music classes, and Kat added that “it’s hard to engage if you don’t speak th[e] [musical] language already” (K. Arrasmith, think-aloud interview, March 10, 2018). Dr. Smith’s desire to be actively engaged with her children while doing musical activities may be crucial to how Pam and John participate in music at home.

Theme Three: Pam’s music at home and elsewhere included leadership.

At the time of data collection, Pam was six-years old and had technically aged-out of Music Play classes at USC (Music Play-University of South Carolina. (2017). Nevertheless, she attended weekly Music Play classes with her mom and brother, and Julia mentioned in her think-aloud interview that Pam had become a musical role model for the younger kids within the classes. According to Julia, she and Kat loved having Pam around [in Music Play classes] because it allowed the parents to see “what [their] child could be” if they went through the entire program. Julia discussed how Pam is now “really confident in giving rhythm patterns in the verbal association” (J. Beck, think-aloud interview, March 10, 2018) as well as confident in “giving pretty advanced rhythm patterns” (J. Beck, think-aloud interview, March 10, 2018) and is quick to process the “reading part of it” (J. Beck, think-aloud interview, March 10, 2018). Pam is also a leader socially, and Julia mentioned that she “acts as a role model for the younger students...and is a really great kind of ...older mentor.” (J. Beck, think-aloud interview, March 10, 2018)

Within the home, Dr. Smith mentioned that Pam took the lead with many of the musical activities. While John did not yet burst into song, Pam often began an improvised song and also pretended play the piano. In the recordings from Dr. Smith, Pam often took the lead from her mother and told John what activity to do next. Dr. Smith discussed in her think-aloud interview

that “Pam will start making up something and then John will want to join in too” and this will turn into this “little dialogue that is surprisingly musical” (S. Smith, think-aloud interview, November 11, 2017). Pam also “nails every [tonal] pattern” (S. Smith, think-aloud interview, November 11, 2017) of the Music Play CD in the car, according to Dr. Smith, and Pam had also recently taken an “increased interest in learning solfege” (S. Smith, think-aloud interview, November 11, 2017).

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview

Purpose and Guiding Research Questions. With the intent of enhancing early childhood music development and understanding, the purpose of this research was to examine the Music Play activities performed by a mother and her children. Following were the guiding research questions of this study.

- What types of music play activities did Dr. Smith and her children perform when they were not in music play classes?
- How did Dr. Smith describe those activities?
- What were Dr. Smith's observations of her children's music development and learning?
- How did Dr. Smith use and adapt music play activities learned in class for her children at home or elsewhere?
- How did Kat Arrasmith and Julia Beck, music play teachers of Dr. Smith's children, describe and interpret the Music Play activities Dr. Smith and her children performed at home or elsewhere?
- What recommendations does Dr. Smith have for parents of young children who want to engage their children in music at home or elsewhere?

Method In this qualitative research study, I used participant observation, multiple observers, and multiple data sources to investigate the nature of Music Play activities within the home. Data sources included:

- Videos and recordings provided by Dr. Smith of her children,

- A think-aloud interview with Dr. Smith,
- A think-aloud interview with Kat Arrasmith,
- A think-aloud interview with Julia Beck.

Findings

After coding the data, I organized my data into active music making, active music making together, non-music making and parental involvement categories. I then engaged in a thematic analysis of the data, and I found the following themes.

- John's music play at home included defiance.
- Dr. Smith was a musical nurturer at home.
- Pam's music play at home included leadership.

Discussion

This study was limited to the perceptions of three adults who viewed video recordings of children in music play activities. Those perceptions may provide insight for others who observe children engaging in music play activities at home. Though John's music play seemed defiant, he often performed his music play in the meter and the tempo of the music play activity in which he and his mom were engaged. According to Rock (2017, para. 5), "quite often, [a child's] refusal is less about not wanting to do something, but more about exercising control over a situation they haven't been able to in the past". Dr. Smith was a musical nurturer because she consistently provided positive feedback and praise to her children's music making activities. She guided the children without trying to control the play. Nell and Drew (2018) argued that play should be "intrinsically motivated" (Nell & Drew, 2018, para. 4) "spontaneous, not scripted" (para. 6), and children should be "free to choose how to play for themselves... [in order to] experience freedom in [choice]" (para. 3). Pam executed her understanding of the social rules of the music play

activities and was a leader by directing the playful music activities, and by sometimes acting like a parent. (A., 2014)

Implications for Parents

This study focused on the music play activities of a mother and her two children. Throughout the interviews with Dr. Smith, Kat, and Valerio, each of them mentioned the importance of having music available in the house as much as possible. If community music classes are available, Dr. Smith, Kat, and Julia recommended that parents join the classes as well to further recognize when their child is making music.

Implications for Music Teachers

Music teachers must make an effort to include parents within their music making. Dr. Smith was a great example of a musical nurturer, and the music classroom should be open parents who want help in engaging in music with their children. The activities that occurred within the community music classes were directly used within the Smith home and car, and music teachers should be aware that they are teaching the parents as much as the children within community music classes.

Implications for Future Research

This study was limited because it focused on the interactions of one family between a mother and her children. For future research, one could look at the differences of music making at home of families who are involved in music play versus families who are not. Dr. Smith and her husband are also musicians, so one might examine the music play activities of families who do not have a musician parent that is present within the house in contrast to those children that do have

musician parents. Lastly, the “growling” stage of 3-4 year old boys might be examined more closely, with more young boys observed making music and evaluated.

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